The Melville Society

NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER, 1950

Volume VI Number 3

One or two copies of the Sealts check-list of Melville's reading, of which 104 were forwarded this summer to paid-up members, apparently have been lost in the mails. It seems possible, even though not likely, that some person may have received more than one copy or that someone may be willing to pass along his copy to another member. Will anyone willing to give up a copy kindly communicate immediately with the secretary?

NAMING THE PEQUOD

Why did Melville select the name **Pequod** for the world's most famous whaling ship? This matter seems never to have been investigated; nor is any documentary information, direct or indirect, presently at hand. Some relevant facts, however, may provide a clue.

Melville sailed in 1841 on the **Acushnet.** This vessel was named presumably for the Acushnet Indians and probably carried a carved Indian as its figurehead. The Acushnet Indians inhabited the land around New Bedford and along the Acushnet River which forms its harbor.

While New Bedford ranked in Melville's day as the leading whaling port of America, there was a second whaling port of considerable prominence not far away at New London, Connecticut. From this port sailed Francis A. Olmsted, whose **Incidents of a Whaling Voyage** Melville drew on for source materials. Melville undoubtedly knew something of New London, the ancestral home of the Pequot, or Pequod, Indians. The Thames River, on whose banks these Indians once lived, had earlier been called the Pequot, and is frequently so designated in eighteenth-century records.

If Melville was recollecting the new **Acushnet** when he wrote about Captain Ahab's ancient whaling vessel, he could hardly have chosen a name for her more appropriate than one which would recall the harbor from which sailed the second largest South Seas whaling fleet of his day.

BEATRICE CENCI

In the possession of Samuel Sukel of Pittsfield are several engravings and prints purchased from Miss Agnes Morewood, Melville's grandniece, and said to have been originally a part of Melville's personal collection. Among these one of the most interesting is an engraving of "Beatrix Cenci," made by Vincent Biondi from the painting by Guido Reni. This is to be reproduced in Jay Leyda's forthcoming **The Melville Log: A Documentary Biography.**

It may be possible to have copies of this engraving made for members of the Society who wish to have them for about $1.50. If those desiring copies will write to the secretary, he will place the order and see that they are mailed. Payment should accompany each order.

PLANS FOR MEETING

President Elizabeth Foster has authorized a call for the annual meeting in New York City on Thursday, December 28. The hour will probably be the early afternoon and the place the New York Public Library. It will be recalled that a successful meeting was held at the library two years ago, and the secretary has written to request the use of a room there again this year. The exact hour of the meeting will be determined by the final plans of the Modern Language Association's American literature group. Further details with respect to time, place, and program will be published in the December Newsletter. Anyone failing to receive final details before leaving for New York City may secure them by inquiring at the information desk of the Modern Language Association (Hotel Statler). Full information will be left there for the convenience of members.

Tentative arrangements (to be confirmed later) are as follows: New York Public Library, Room 213, Thursday afternoon, December 28, 1950, the exact hour to be announced. Mr. Herbert Cahoon of the library

staff is preparing a list of all Melville items in the library's possession and is planning to arrange an exhibit of selected items for the occasion.

NOTES

A Reading of Moby-Dick, by M. O. Percival, has just been published by the University of Chicago Press. A circular from the publisher describing the book is enclosed with the Newsletter.

The secretary has again reminded the editors of the **Encyclopedia Britannica** that a revision of the article on Melville is urgently needed. Consideration of the matter during the preparation of the fifteenth edition has been promised.

A discussion of methods used in teaching **Moby-Dick** in the colleges will take place during the annual conference of the New England College English Association, to be held at Brandeis University on Saturday, October 28. Participants in the discussion (sub-title: "Symbolism and the Undergraduate") are Sherman Paul of Harvard, Patrick Quinn of Wellesley, and David Egell of Simmons. The organization is a branch of the College English Association.

Members are urged to notify the secretary promptly of any change of address. Information is desired regarding the present whereabouts of members Lucien Santoni and Tom Wendel.

If a sufficient number of our members are interested in having it, the secretary will be happy to prepare for distribution at the end of the year a complete membership roster. He hesitates to prepare it until assured that it will prove useful.

One item of business for the December meeting will be the election of an additional member for the executive committee. President Elizabeth Foster, whose five-year term expires this year, will be succeeded in office by Howard P. Vincent.

Two inquiries have been received regarding the nomination of Melville to a place in New York University's Hall of Fame. While frequently nominated, Melville has never received enough votes from the Hall of Fame committee to secure election. The secretary has been notified to the effect that Melville's name will have a place on the next ballot.

As originally announced in 1944, the Bibliographical Society of America, through the help of a grant of money from an unnamed source, has undertaken to sponsor a definitive short-title bibliography of American literature from the Federal period to about 1930. Jacob Blanck is research editor, with offices at 62 W. 45 St., New York 19, N. Y. Anyone who has discovered the location of any substantial collection of first editions of Melville or of other American writers is invited to communicate with the editor. While excellent progress has been made, it is not expected that the manuscript will be completed for another two or three years.

Hiram Haydn, editor of the Twentieth Century Library for Scribner's, reports that a volume on Melville will probably be included in the series. With eighteen volumes under way, additions are now likely to be made more slowly. The series is concerned with nineteenth-century thinkers who have influenced the thought of our own time.

Last-minute news: The American literature group of M. L. A. will hold meetings on Thursday, December 28, at 9:15-10:45 and 11:00-12:30. Possibly there will also be a luncheon. Our meeting, therefore, has been scheduled tentatively at 2:30 in the afternoon. At this late date, any further suggestion regarding the program should be sent directly to our president, Elizabeth Foster, at Oberlin College. A postal card to the secretary stating whether you plan to be present at the meeting would also be helpful.

THE *Melville Society* NEWSLETTER
IS PUBLISHED THREE OR FOUR TIMES EACH YEAR
for the members of the Melville Society, a group of scholars and other persons interested in the life and works of Herman Melville. The Society seeks to facilitate the exchange of information among its members, to stimulate the study of Melville's life and works, and to contribute toward the improvement of the facilities for literary, historical, and bibliographical research. Membership (including subscription to the Newsletter) may be secured through payment of one dollar annually to the Secretary, Tyrus Hillway, 423 Pequot Avenue, New London, Connecticut.